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ABSTRACT

Third in a series of publications of the New Jersey State Department of Education, Division of Research, Planning and Evaluation, this paper compares and contrasts the historical paths traveled by two contemporary, highly technological countries (the United States and England) in determining a prevailing age for entry into schools. Through identification of societal interests and pressures in both countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the author concludes that in both the United States and England age of entry into formal schooling has always been more influenced by social and economic considerations than by pedagogical or psychological needs. (MP)

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Occasional Papers in Education

NEW JERSEY STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DIVISION OF RESEARCH, PLANNING AND EVALUATION

WHEN SHOULD SCHOOLING BEGIN?

BY:

Maureen McGee
and
Tynette Hills

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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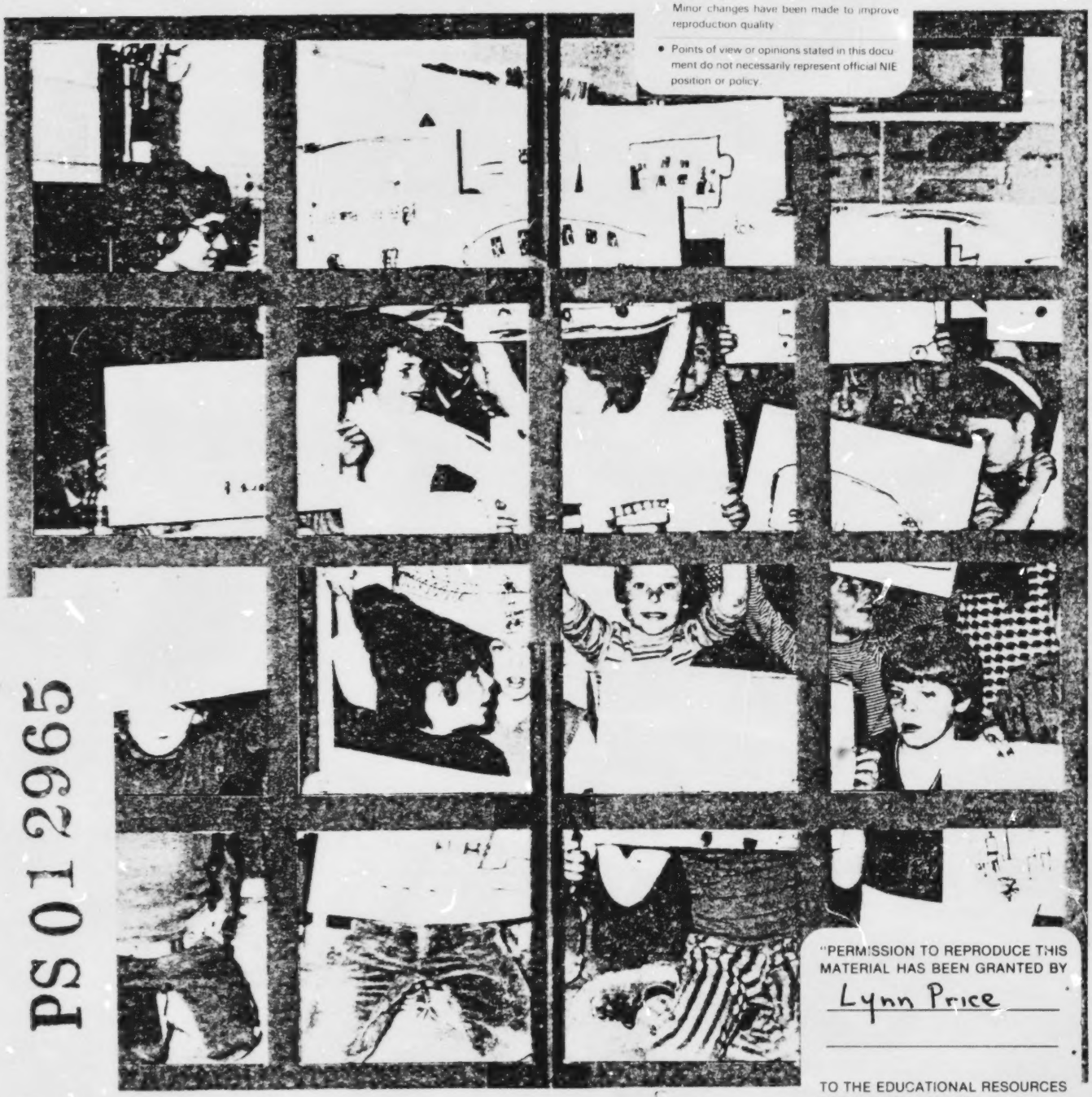

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WHEN SHOULD SCHOOLING BEGIN?

PAPER NO. 3 - POLICY STUDIES OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD PLANNING PROJECT

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Division of Research, Planning & Evaluation

Dear Colleague:

In mid-1976, as the final pieces of legislation implementing Chapter 212 were being put into place, the Department of Education began to turn attention to some needs and problems which had been held in abeyance for awhile. It was time to look ahead and study other educational needs of the people of New Jersey. Several under-served groups were identified. Young children and their parents formed one of those groups. More recently, in fiscal year 1978, the State Board of Education designated early childhood as one of nine areas to receive priority in planning.

A planning component, the Early Childhood Planning Project was developed within the Division of Research, Planning, and Evaluation in response to our planning needs. The project encompasses several major kinds of activities. One of these is background research into early childhood issues and analysis of options for policy decisions. In this process, the project has produced several papers which we believe to be of interest to a wide audience.

The present paper is one of these. When Should Schooling Begin? presents a comparative examination of rationales for determining the age of entry into schooling, as utilized by two contrasting modern nations. Other papers provide a demographic description of young children in New Jersey; a consideration of appropriate initiatives and responsibility for child care; and a summary of results of early educational intervention programs. I believe that you will find these occasional papers to be informative and thought-provoking. I invite your comment on them and solicit your suggestions for our on-going series of "Occasional Papers in Education."

Cordially,

Gary Gappert
Assistant Commissioner

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Introduction: Rationales for Age of School Entry

by

Tynette W. Hills

Public institutions are the subject of both internal and external scrutiny. On the one hand, this scrutiny takes the form of demands for responsiveness and accountability. On the other hand, it turns to questions of mandates and practicality. Our needs are great; yet our resources are perceived as more nearly finite than ever before.

There are numerous, and sometimes conflicting, expectations of public institutions, including the public schools. Concurrently, we have undertaken the extension of educational programming to formerly under-served groups, and we have begun to admit our limitations. Some educators have cautioned against expecting schools to solve social problems. Unabated public expectations and demands may overtax the public schools so that their primary function is jeopardized.

However, as Maureen McGee shows in this Occasional Paper, there is by no means a clear consensus about the purposes of public education. This can be clearly seen in the manner in which societies determine the proper chronological age at which children are inducted into schooling. Far from being handed down as truth or even as truism, the age of entry into schooling has been adopted

in response to not one, but various factors. The present age standard may not even reflect underlying folk wisdom regarding the relative dependence and independence of children, or their ability to deal with abstract symbols. It is far more likely to reflect farm, factory and market-place.

In this paper, Maureen McGee compares and contrasts the historical paths traveled by two contemporary, highly technological countries in determining a prevailing age for entry into their schools. Despite sharing a long history in common, both the paths and the conclusions have differed. Age of entry into schooling has always been influenced by social and economic considerations. The comparative case study approach used here provides historical models of societies facing, in other times, some of the same issues we now face.

Here are some of the phenomena we presently observe in the United States and in New Jersey: our people are highly mobile; families headed by a single parent are on the increase; nuclear families are not only widespread--they are typical; the number of adults living in a family unit is declining. One of the most far-reaching economic changes in recent history is the large scale participation in the work force by women, including mothers of pre-school and school-age children.[1] Who will care for these

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[1]For a demographic description of families with young children in our state, see The Status of Young Children in New Jersey, Policy Paper 1, Early Childhood Planning Project, Division of Research, Planning and Evaluation, Department of Education, Trenton, N.J. 1978.

children? As the accompanying paper shows, both England and the United States have often answered in the past, "the schools." Such an answer has not been withheld until evidence accumulated that children were ready for the programs. On the contrary, in a number of cases, the program was made ready for the children. Schooling might be academic instruction, or it might be training in personal care...it might be Americanization of immigrant children.

We arrive at this point in history with a view of the child quite different from that of our counterparts of a hundred or more years ago. As Philippe Ariès has pointed out, we have not always had a concept of childhood, even though we have always had children.[2] Childhood as a distinct period in human development is a mental construct of fairly recent vintage, and our attitudes of protection, tenderness, and concern for children rest on that concept. Our concern for allowing children to be children, and for allowing them to accomplish childish things springs from our deeply held beliefs that childhood is a unique, essential, and precious time.

We now view childhood as an important part of the pattern of human development, with its sequential and distinct periods of increasingly complex and more highly integrated organization and behavior.[3]

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[2]Philippe Aries, Centuries of Childhood (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), Chapter 2.

[3]Jean Piaget, "Piaget's Theory", Carmichael's Manual of Child Psychology, Vol. I., Cahpter 9 (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1970).

Marked differences separate children from adults. Less distinct differences obtain between younger and older children. A vast body of literature from the child study movement and from developmental theory and research has pointed to some of the differences. Between the ages of five and seven, for example, most young children change in the modes and kinds of learning that they can successfully undertake.[4] Prior to that period, however, young children are avid learners.

The question of an optimal age for entry into schooling may not have a single best answer. In this Occasional Paper, it is shown that the determination of age standards for entry into school is based historically on the needs of society at a given time. Currently, we face a time in which it seems necessary for one or more public institutions to supplement the family in providing settings in which young children may receive care and may thrive.

In what ways should such social issues affect the timing and content of schooling? The question of <u>when</u> an educational program should begin for a young child cannot or should not be answered apart from questions of what, how, who, where, and why.[5] In this Occasional Paper, the writer raises the educational implications of relative continuties and discontinuities between home

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[4]Sheldon H. White, "Evidence for a Hierarchical Arrangement of Learning Processes", <u>Advances in Child Development and Behavior</u>, edited by L.P. Lipsitt and C. Spiker, Vol 2 (New York: Academic Press, 1965). Pp. 187-220.

[5]Ellis D. Evans, <u>Contemporary Influences in Early Childhood Education 2nd Ed.</u>, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1975) pp. 31-34.

and community. The questions of when, what, how, who, where, and why revolve around such a dimension.

If requirements of a child in a family are similar to the requirements of community life, the family is able to take an important educative role. To the extent that the cultural requirements are dissimilar, the family needs augmentation by other institutions. Those institutions must be identified and the nature of the supplement must be determined.

Age of Entry into Public Schooling provides food for thought that is necessary as we consider possible and appropriate contributions from early public education.

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AGE OF ENTRY INTO PUBLIC SCHOOLING IN THE UNITED STATES AND GREAT BRITAIN

by

Maureen McGee

At what point in a child's life is it fitting and proper to introduce state-supported services and supplemental family care and training? The answer to that question is of consequence to the way in which a society organizes itself. Basic to the formulation of this issue is the age of entry into public schooling. The current controversy over public sponsorship of day care pivots on the difference between pre-school and school age children.[1] What is the significance of preschool, as contrasted with school age? What is the rationale we have for state-supported services to children aged five or six that was not valid when they were three or four?

It is the aim of this paper to examine how the specific age of entry into public schools was determined. Societal interests and pressures that have transcended technical pedagogical concerns will be identified. Towards that end, the process of determining age of entry in the United States and England will be traced, and the more basic underlying questions will be analyzed.

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[1] See Raymond S. Moore, "Let's Keep the Little Kids Home" Compact, VII (November - December, 1973), pp. 22-24, and Raymond S. Moore and Dennis R. Moore, "How Early Should They Go To School?" Childhood Education, Vol. 50, No. 1, October 1973. Theirs is the best formulated of the arguments against early schooling or child care in publicly supported facilities.

Entry into Schooling in England and the United States

Seven was the Age of Transition. There has existed a strong, widespread, and ancient tradition in Western European history that the age of seven years was the proper age for the beginning of formal schooling, if such existed. From the age of seven, ancient Egyptian nobles lived in Pharoah's Court: Spartan boys left home for the public barracks: Athenian youngsters were set to schooling or to learning household tasks: and Roman boys began elementary school. Aristotle taught that, since children were by nature irrational, they were to be guarded at all times against work and study until the age of seven.[2] Catholic Canon Law sets the age of seven as the age of reason.

Both in literature and custom, the age of seven survived into modern times as a basic turning point in childhood. Medieval knights were inducted into service as pages at seven or eight; apprenticeship usually commenced at seven; moralistic and pedagogic literature of the middle ages called for seven as the age of starting school or starting work[3]; Mary Tudor's tutor, Juan Luis Vives, wrote

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[2]Adolphe E. Meyer, An Educational History of the Western World (New York; McGraw Hill, 1965, 1972). Chapters 1 to 5.

[3]Meyer, op cit, Chapters 2 to 7.

in 1531 that boys should be sent to school at seven.[4] Even in English common law, children after the age of seven were presumed capable of criminal intent and held responsible for it, to the same extent as adults.[5]

Indeed, there is a remarkable succession of examples where education--however, a society defines it--begins at the age of seven. Their common root in tradition seems obvious (tradition was no frivolous argument through most of Western History). However, the initial rationale was probably arbitrary or superstitious or accidental--anything but the analytical reference to stages of child development which might convince a modern audience. Little theory is offered in support of seven as the age of schooling or work. Perhaps in the face of such long-standing tradition, little analysis seemed appropriate or necessary.

Setting the Age of Entry in England

Analysis of the process by which the age of school entry was set in England illustrates how little importance was attached to the precise age, and how much more important was the influence of practical experience than theoretical

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[4]Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (New York: Randon House, 1962), p. 210.

[5]John Layson and Harold Silver, A Social History of Education in England (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1973). p.111.

arguments. There was some discussion of course,[6] but, in substance and scope, it was almost an afterthought to the central educational questions of the nineteenth century in England--public education and compulsory schooling.

In early nineteenth century England, whenever popular education was discussed in Parliament, "school age" was defined as six to twelve or seven to thirteen, usually the latter. This was the age range for whom the great voluntary societies, which acted as the agents of most lower class schooling until the 1870's, aimed to provide schools.[7] Regardless of how "school age" was defined, these voluntary society schools were pressed to admit children under seven as a result of progress in restricting child labor and of the decline in numbers of unskilled tasks for child laborers to perform, as industry became increasingly mechanized.[8]

When mothers worked and younger children were barred from factories, some sort of supervision was needed for working class children. Schools seemed the logical place to provide it. Indeed, the Parliamentary Committee on Education in 1838 expressed the view that educational provision was

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[6]For instance, a Royal Commission investigating elementary education in 1861 found that "if 2 children enter an elementary school at seven, one coming from a good infant school and the other uneducated, the child from the infant school will make as much progress by the age of 10 as the other will by the age of 12." (Skeats, 1861, p. 59 quoted in Nanette Whitbread, The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School: A History of Infant-Nursery Education in Britain, 1800-1970 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 26).

[7]Ibid., page 6.

[8]The first effective Factory Act (1833) prohibited children under 9 from working in textile mills. In 1842 the age was extended to under 10 in coal mines, and in 1867 rulings were extended to include all factories employing over 50 workers.

desirable from the age of three for working class children. Although nothing came of their view immediately, by the mid-nineteenth century there were not only a great many more infant schools but also a great increase in the number of children under seven attending elementary schools.[9]

Some very pragmatic considerations supported this practice. For instance, even when school inspectors reported that the large number of children under seven in elementary schools hindered efficient teaching of older children, they did not recommend excluding younger children for two reasons: 1) it would drive the older children away to mind them at home; 2) attendance was so irregular for the over-seven-year-olds that it seemed wise to take advantage of every chance to start elementary education earlier.[10]

As life at home and in the streets made school increasingly a practical necessity - for children as well as their working mothers - it seemed to many that accommodations for the poor, aged two to seven, could not and should not be left to chance. Thus in 1870, when English statutory compulsory education was established, the age for schooling was set at five, but poor children two to seven who were already in infant schools were allowed to remain, if

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[9]By 1861, 19.8% of children three to six were attending public elementary schools. (Ibid.)

[10]Whitbread, ibid., Chapter 2.

schools could accommodate them.[11]

Five as the Age of Entry in England. How, specifically, was this age limit determined? In setting it at five, England broke with the original practice of the British voluntary societies which regarded seven as the starting age, and set Britain's policy apart from those of the rest of Europe and the United States.

During the Parliamentary debates over the 1870 Education Act concerning the minimum age for compulsory attendance, some argued that "five was too tender an age for compulsory attendance" and that "parents would like to keep their children at home until they are six years of age."[12] But it was the contrary arguments which prevailed:[13]

1) Children were safer at school than at home.
2) It was never too early to inculcate habits of decency, cleanliness, and order.
3) Younger children learned more rapidly.
4) It was difficult to obtain the time for education without treading on the time for gaining a living. Beginning early and ending early would present a solution.

The last point is particularly telling. Even so official a document as the 1933 Hadow Report on Infant and

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[11]Lillian Weber, The English Infant and Informal Education (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971). p. 162. In her study of British Infant Schools, Lillian Weber states that the British rationale for integrating early childhood programs into the practice of the state system reflected the fact that very young children were in English state schools from the beginning. Her thesis is that in earlier United States history, there was no need to have babies in school in such numbers, or to care for children of such vast numbers of working mothers from densely settled areas of great poverty. (p.239). Comparing the numbers and concentration of working mothers in the United States and England throughout the 19th century would offer a good check to this theory.

[12]National Education Union, 1870, p. 441, in Whitbread, op.cit., p. 86.

[13]Ibid.

Nursery Schools explicitly recognized that the statutory age of five marked no significant developmental stage. However, the rulings on child labor of the later nineteenth century had been very clear about the age when children could work and the amount of prior schooling prerequisite to their work. At a time when it was an important part of family income, child labor was forbidden until a certain age, and was limited to children who had completed a given amount of schooling (or possessed certain skills). Attempts to obtain the required amount of schooling prior to the permissive age of work produced a very real demand for entry into schooling at a specific age. This dynamic was at work informally before the child labor legislation and explicitly after child labor laws took effect in the mid-nineteenth century.

Thus infant teachers in the years 1800-1840 reported that they felt pressure to begin formal instruction to children as young as possible because schooling was often cut short by juvenile employment at eight or nine.[14] Then in 1860, the first Mines Acts with educational provisions were enacted. They prohibited employment of boys under ten and required that those between ten and twelve who sought employment be certified, before employment, as able to read and write.[15]

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[14] Ibid, p. 14.

[15] Gilliam Sutherland, Policy Making in Elementary Education, 1870-1895 Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973, p. 116.

So we see why much of the parliamentary debate of 1880 over compulsory attendance presented the problem as one of rationalizing the position concerning child labor. It was a matter of making it clear to everyone when the child had to go to school and how soon he was able to go to work rather than one of securing an established minimal education for every child.[16] In 1880, the law required all children to attend school for a minimum of five years. When attendance for five years is combined with a minimum age of work at ten, the rationale for entering school at five becomes clear indeed.

Twentieth Century Postscript. Although the major part of the story of how and why England set its age of entry at five is completed with the end of the nineteenth century Parliamentary debates, a few twentieth century developments bear mention. Margaret McMillan was a pioneer in efforts to provide adequate services to young children. Her fight for public support of nursery services for two to five year olds could serve as a model of such campaigns. Publicizing the plight of poor children in London and the need for the prevention of health problems, she drew public attention to the high percentage of young men found unfit for military service in World War I because of undiagnosed medical conditions and personal maladjustments.

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[16]Ibid., p. 151.

She directed public concern to the quality of the first six years of life. "If you don't want ailing and maladjusted young men, it's a good idea to work to prevent ailing and maladjusted young childern" was her basic message.[17]

After World War II, experiences in nurseries and schools and official studies of the effects of evacuation during the war resulted in a sharp distinction between preschool children under and over the age of two. There was general agreement that separation from mothers for children under two-and-a-half was likely to be emotionally harmful, but that benefits in terms of social learning and development were likely for children over two-and-a-half.[18]

Against this background, the 1967 Plowden Committee recognized the need for universal availability of nursery education and called for immediate expansion, with the ultimate aim of making early education available for all children whose parents desired it from the beginning of the school year after the third birthday.

Setting the Age of Entry in the United States

The two most interesting aspects of the age of entry into public schooling in the United States are:

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[17]Samuel Braun and Esther P. Edwards, History and Theory of Early Childhood Education (Worthington: Charles A. Jones Publishing Co., 1972), pp. 131.

[18]Whitbread, op.cit. p. 102.

1) the arbitrariness of early practices and regulations
2) the issues raised when kindergartens were introduced in this country

Colonial and Early Federal Practices. In the early nineteenth century, children were not allowed to enter first grade until they read at beginning levels. Boston Latin School took students at the age of seven or so--when they could read simple sentences like "the cat ate the mouse".[19] Infant schools were, therefore, popular, especially in the Eastern cities. To introduce reading was the chief rationale for early schooling; a child would start prior to the seventh birthday, as early as necessary to acquire the requisite skills.

In Philadelphia schools, there was no set age to enter or leave in the colonial period. Pupils began as early as three or four and as late as fourteen or fifteen. The normal age to begin was between six and eight, and some contemporary writers described formal Quaker education (a strong influence in educational development in Pennsylvania, and New York as well)[20] as addressed to the ages of seven to fourteen.[21]

The Free School Society which organized the first public school in New York City in 1806 did not admit children

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[19] Meyer, op.cit., p. 198.

[20] Diane Ravitch, The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973 (New York: Basic Books, 1974). p.9.

[21] J. William Frost, The Quaker Family in Colonial America (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973), p. 121.

under six.[22] From these scattered practices emerged the patterns which were to characterize early education in this county. No standard, specified age was set for entry into these schools which became the nucleus of our educational "system", actually not to be formalized as a system for decades to come.

It is most likely that setting of the age of entry was a pragmatic exercise, like the determination of the schedule of the school year and the school day. The calendar of the school year reflected the needs of an agrarian society to have the children's help in the fields during growing and harvesting season. The shape of the school day - "another ritual whose original justification has largely disappeared"-was set so that children could complete their morning chores beforehand and do their afternoon chores when they returned.[23]

Nineteenth Century Attendance Legislation. A New York Law of 1814 set the permissive age of schooling as five to fifteen. New Hampshire legislated four to fourteen in 1862. Vermont did the same in 1865. The Maryland School

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[22]A private organization composed of upper class philanthropists, men who shunned partisan politics but helped to found New York's great libraries, hospitals and museums. Ravitch, op.cit., p. 18.

[23]Arthur W. Foshay, "Sources of School Practice", The Elementary School in the United States, Part II of National Society for the Study of Education Yearbook, 1973. John I. Goodlad and Harold G. Shane, Ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973). p. 179.

Law of 1865 required schools to be free to all white persons aged six to nineteen. Kentucky and Virginia also set six as the permissive age of entry for whites.[24]

As the states followed the Massachusetts enactment of modern compulsory attendance laws in 1852, the regulations they set down created a mosaic of different age requirements.[25] Had there been a clear and known rationale for a particular age of entry, it certainly does not seem to have figured in the States' legislation.[26]

Promoters of Kindergarten Raised Age of Schooling Issues. As background, it is important to note that there was some early experience in this country with public support of education for children younger than those customarily admitted to school. That there was little effective opposition to such publicly supported education for young children is suggested by the fact that the city of Boston appropriated $5,000 in 1818 to incorporate the infant school into the city school system. Designated a "primary school", it accepted children at four, and prepared them for entry into

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[24]Victor M. Rice, Special Report on the Present State of Education in the United States and Other Countries and on Compulsory Education. Albany, New York State Department of Public Instruction, 1967.

[25]Although beyond the scope of this paper, the story of U.S. compulsory attendance legislation and the historiography of subsequent interpretations of it are fascinating and very well presented in David B. Tyack, "Ways of Seeing: An Essay in the History of Compulsory Schooling", Harvard Educational Review Vol. 46, Nunber 3, (August 1976), pp. 355-389.

[26]The compulsory education legislation of the States as of 1910 is reproduced in Appendix I.

the regular lower school, now named the "grammar school." Although Massachusetts was always ahead of other states in schooling, this example "was soon followed elsewhere".[27] Systematic preparation for entry into the lower school was the rationale.

When kindergartens were introduced into the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, they were promoted for reasons that ranged from the humanitarian to the political and pedagogical. They were attractive to many concerned Americans because they were seen as parallels to the settlement houses developed in the 1880's, in response to the poverty and squalor in the urban slums. By starting children off on the correct path, there was hope for an "improved future generation".[28]

The pattern of expansion was from private and philanthropic sponsorship to public support. The first step was usually the development of private kindergartens for parents who could afford them, and "mission" kindergartens for the underpriviledged. Public support followed, as financial pressures on the philanthropic boards which had supported kindergartens made them turn to the public schools, asking initially for classroom space, later for equipment and teachers' salaries, then full financial support.[29]

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[27]Meyer, op.cit., p. 340.

[28]Evelyn Weber, The Kindergartein: Its Encounter with Educational Thought in America, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969). p. 38.

[29]Patty Hill Smith, quoted in Evelyn Weber, ibid., p. 41.

The specific rationales for public support of kindergartens that were advanced during this period of gradual expansion offer some insight into nineteenth century thinking on education for young children. In their arguments for publicly supported kindergartens, Henry Barnard, first United States Commissioner of Education, and William Harris, United States Commissioner of Education during 1889-1906, presented a good summary of respectable educational thought on the subject during the late nineteenth century.[30]

In an 1868 report to the United States Senate, William Harris said:[31]

> As the great formative period of the human being precedes the age at which children now attend school, it is necessary that by some arrangement, public or private, the age of impression should not be lost for the best purposes...I know of no agency so philosophical and so attractive to these purposes as the kindergarten of Froebel.

If this reflected contemporary thinking, at least in the supposition that "the great formative period" preceded school age, then we can suppose that school age had not been set with an eye to influencing or educating children during their most impressionable period. It is interesting to speculate whether some link existed between kindergarten's association with settlement work, the effort to rescue poor children while they were still impressionable. Was it

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[30]The possibility that their enthusiasm might stem from an interest in increasing the mandate of the school system which they serve as administrators and policy makers should not be overlooked. Still theirs was the position which prevailed.

[31]William Harris in Henry Barnard, Papers on Froebel's Kindgergarten with Suggestions on Principles and Methods of Child Culture in Different Countries (Hartford: Barnard's American Journal of Education, 1890). p. 320

perhaps more important to reach poor and immigrant children when they were most impressionable than it was to reach middle class children at such a time? Perhaps schools were not quite so explicitly envisioned as socializing agents when they were formed as when they were charged with the Americanization of newly arrived foreigners.[32]

In a directly practical vein, as Evelyn Weber points out, the kindergarten programwas deemed valuable as preparation for "vocational" training later given to many of the children attending schools in slum areas.[33]

William Harris, Superintendent of St. Louis schools at the time of the first connection of a kindergarten with a public school system, in 1873, based his support of kindergartens in public schools on a theory of stages of child development. He also subscribed to a variant of "the earlier the better" philosophy applied to a period of a child's life when they need socialization but lack abilities to do regular academic work.

His notion of stages is evident in his explanation that:[34]

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[32]The best recent treatment of Revisionist history of American education is in Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life (New York: Basic Books, 1976), especially chapters 2,4,5,7, and 9.

[33]Evelyn Weber, The Kindergarten..., op.cit., p.41.

[34]Barnard, op.cit, p. 634.

> At the age of three the child begins to emerge from the circumscribed life of the family, and to acquire an interest in the life of society...This increases until the school period begins, at his seventh year. The fourth, fifth and sixth years are years of transition, not well provided for by either family life or social life in the United States.

The value of kindergarten per se, the reason that it was "worthy of a place in the common school system" was that:

> By this means we gain the child for one or two years when he is good for nothing else but education and not of much value even for the education of the school as it is and has been.[35]

Why should society care about how these "years of transition" are passed? His reasoning is quite explicit:

> In families of great poverty, the child forms evil associations of the street, and is initiated into crime. By the time he is ready to enter the school, he is hardened in vicious habits, beyond the power of the school to eradicate... Society is benefitted by the substitution of a rational training of the child's will during his transition period. If he is a child of poverty, he is saved by the good associations and the industrial and intellectual training that he gets.[36]

Lest we think that the kindergarten will benefit no one but the child of poverty, Harris is more inclusive.

> If he is a child of wealth, he is saved by the kindergarten from ruin through self-indulgence and the corruption ensuing on weak management in the family.[37]

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[35] Ibid., p. 631
[36] Ibid., p. 634
[37] Ibid.

It is important to note that the notion of public responsibility for what happened to children was not limited to supporters of kindergarten. Victor M. Rice, New York's Superintendent of Public Instruction argues as follows in a 1867 report to the State Legislature:

> There is no legal remedy for poverty; nor is it the province of society to treat the poor as vagrants and criminals. If parents are unable to support their children they must be aided. It may be considered by some economists to be culpable improvidence for a common laborer to marry...But laborers will obey the instincts of nature. Prohibitory laws forbidding marriage, in some of the German states, until a man can show a magistrate his ability to support a family, have resulted only in an increase of illegitimate births. Legislation cannot change or suspend the laws of God...[38]

Rice answers his rhetorical question "Should the State leave the children of the poor to grow up in ignorance" with a definite denial and warning that "If universal education is the means for an absolute monarchy to confirm its power, is it not still more necessary for a Republic?[39]

From Harris and the kindergarten movement, the final point of importance to our story concerns any proposal for a downward extension of conventional schooling as an alternative to kindergarten programs. That there should be no such extension was, of course, stressed by kindergarten enthusiasts. But Harris' reasoning suggests that

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[38]Rice, op.cit., p. 52.
[39]Rice, ibid., p. 45.

an argument could be made--successfully--for public provision of services to children which were deemed necessary but not at all academic in nature.

As a sort of "given" in his arguments runs the idea that "children aged four to six are not mature enough to receive profit from the studies of the school. The conventional and disciplinary studies are too much for the powers of the child of four to five years".[40] Whether or not this was an argument in support of beginning formal schooling no earlier than seven is an interesting question. The point is that such an argument could be made--successfully--people were willing to accept state-supported services for children that were explicitly not academic. So even the age of entry into formal schooling was not considered an age below which the state had no right or responsibility to offer services where needed.

More Fundamental Issues Which Underlie Age of Entry Into Formal Public Schooling

Both historically and conceptually, "to educate in schools or not to educate in schools"? is a question that must arise and be addressed before the age of entry into schooling can be determined. In other words, before we know when to start schooling, we must know why we have

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[40]Harris, in Barnard, op.cit. p. 634

schooling and what are the tasks which schooling performs.

Since education, in its broadest sense, is nothing less than the cultural process, it has always existed in one form or another. For schooling to assume responsibility for a large part of this task, something must have changed: was the change in the society for which education prepares its members, or in the agents traditionally charged with the transmission of culture, or in both?

It was the family that was traditionally charged, both explicitly and implicitly, with education. Changes in the family and in its ability to prepare its children for adult life precipitated the rise of formal schooling as the chief agent of education.[41] The impact of societal factors touched the child through their effects on the family.

How the questions of formal schooling should be resolved is by no means a foregone conclusion, especially in an age which debates the merits of "de-schooling" and in a tradition which is one of but nine in the entire history of man which has evolved a formal system of education.[42]

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[41]Students have traced the rise of mass formal schooling to everything from the Renaissance to the Industrial Revolution to the spread of Protentantism. Good arguments can be made in each case. The point here is simply that each can be seen as making demands on members of society which necessitated an education that most families were unable or unwilling to provide.

[42]Formal here means that trained teachers impart whatever knowledge is considered crucial. The nine are ancient Sumeria, ancient Egypt, Traditional China, India, Persia, Islam, the Mayas and Aztecs and Incas, and the Western tradition which originated in Greece and Judea. Braun and Edwards, op.cit., p. 22.

The most basic issue in formal schooling centers on the dichotomy between education as a process to maintain continuity, and education as a means to create discontinuities. Pre-industrial education was a process by which continuity was maintained between parent and child. Modern education includes a heavy emphasis on its function of creating discontinuities. To transform the child of the African peasant into a clerk, or the farmer into a lawyer, or the Italian immigrant into an American, has been lauded as one of the highest goals and greatest achievements of modern schooling.[43]

When the goal of education is discontinuity, formal schooling will seem more appropriate and more efficient. But when the goal is continuity, a sense of connectedness, education in the family--especially for young children--will in all likelihood prevail.

The best way to illustrate this historial and conceptual shift in the family's educative role is to examine the differences between the medieval and modern concepts of primary education. In the middle ages that "elementary and empirical knowledge which we impart through primary school--reading, writing, mother tongue and what is essential to be able to get along in life--was not taught in school.

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[43]Margaret Mead gives an excellent analysis of this point in "Our Educational Emphases in Primitive Perspective", in John Middleton, ed., From Child to Adult: Studies on the Anthropology of Education (Garden City: Natural History Press, 1970). Chapter One.

It was acquired at home or in apprenticeship."[44] Indeed, until the eighteenth century, formal organized instruction of any kind was confined to a minority, largely those training for the clergy. Most people received no education outside the home and picked up the values and customs of their communities and the skills for economic survival in a more or less haphazard way.[45]

The case of England illustrates how the family declined not only in its ability to educate its children informally, but also in its inclination to train others' sons in formal apprenticeship. The replacement of the medieval extended household by the modern nuclear family is of overriding significance in the rise of schooling. The "household" was inescapably an institution committed, among other functions, to an educational function. The instruction given to pages and apprentices was deliberate and continuous and extended into the moral as well as the strictly vocational. (But the family drew in upon itself, especially in the eighteenth century; its advocates were faced by an educational vacuum). Formal apprenticeship was dying, often merely a

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[44]Ariès, op.cit., p. 141.

[45]David Wardle, The Rise of the Schooled Society: The History of Formal Schooling in England (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) p. 2.

euphemism for child exploitation, while families either accepted no educational responsibility or wanted to delegate the educational function. The school was a necessary expedient to fill the gap.[46]

The Colonial American Experience. The colonial American experience offers a particularly clear illustration of this movement away from family education towards more formal schooling.

As Bernard Bailyn writes, the forms of education assumed by the first generation of settlers in America were a direct inheritance from the medieval past. "Serving the needs of a homogeneous, slowly changing rural society, they were largely instinctive and traditional, little articulated and little formalized."[47] The most important agency in the transfer of culture was, therefore, not formal institutions of instruction, but the family, in which the conjugal unit was only the nucleus of a "broad kinship community whose outer edges merged almost imperceptibly

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[46] Ibid, chapter 1. Of course the school was not a new institution in the 18th century; schools had a recognized, although subordinate place in the educational scheme before that time. Some offered an academic course especially for prospective clergymen, although even in that they enjoyed no monopoly. For even after parents stopped sending their children to other households for instruction, they often kept them at home to be educated by tutors. Our concern here is with the rise of the formal school as the main source of education for the majority of children.

[47] Bernard Baily, Education in the Forming of American Society (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1960), p. 15. This section is largely based on Bailyn's study.

into the society at large".[48]

Families were, in the first place, the primary agents in the socialization of the child. Not only did the family introduce him to the basic forms of civilized living, but it shaped his attitudes, formed his patterns of behavior, and endowed him with manners and morals. It introduced him to the world, and, in so doing, reinforced the structure of its authority. Furthermore, in a great many cases, all the vocational instruction necessary for mature life was provided by the family. This role in vocational training was extended and formalized in apprenticeship here as in England.

However, by the end of the colonial period, the traditional configuration of educational processes had been radically transformed. Education was wrenched loose from the automatic, instinctive workings of society, and cast as a matter for conscious deliberation. Its functionings had become problematical and controversial. Many were transferred from informal to formal institutions; schools and formal schooling acquired a new importance, and assumed cultural burdens they had not assumed before. Education thus became an instrument of deliberate social purpose.[49]

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[48] Ibid., p. 16.
[49] Ibid., page 15 to 20.

Why? The most important source of this shift was those changes which overtook the family. Its role as the primary agent of cultural transfer was "jeopardized, reduced, and partly superseded"[50] as the traditional organization of the family simply were not adaptive to life in the new world.[51]

Perhaps the most significant resulting implication for the development of the child in colonial society concerned the process of his entry into that society. As the family contracted towards a nuclear grouping, the once elaborate interpenetration of family and community dissolved. The border line between them grew sharper; the passage from family to society lost its ease and naturalness and became abrupt, deliberate, and decisive, open to question, concern, and decision. A heightening of sensitivity to educational processes accompanied the decline of the family's traditional effectiveness. There was a consequent increase in attention to formal education and the burdens placed upon it.[52]

The transfer of educative functions from family to school was a gradual process. In the late nineteenth century, as households became more like units of consumption than of production, educators such as John Dewey expressed

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[50] Ibid., p. 22

[51] Reasons included the relatively more rapid adaptation of children to new conditions by contact with their parents; the shortage of labor which made it difficult for fathers to exercise their traditional hierarchical control over the labor of sons and apprentices; and the uncertainties of wilderness living, which made nuclear families a more efficient and workable unit than the large, extended, traditional family.

[52] Baily, op.cit., page 24.

concern about the transfer of occupational tasks from home to factory, and the consequent limitation in educational experiences available to the child in the home.[53]

It seems evident that education has evolved in response to changes in the family, its structure, and its functions. Our current system of formal schooling and our practice of looking to it to perform most of our educational functions arose from necessity, rather than from any philosophical debates or pedagogical theorizing. (As the family changed, formal schooling moved to pick up much of the "cultural burden" which families no longer bore.) In surveying both contemporary and historical patterns of education, it is important to bear in mind that education is a tremendously elaborate and intricate affair, of which schooling and family learning are but parts, shifting in their roles, now taking up, now casting off part of the educative function.

Public Support of Formal Schooling. Once the determination on formal schooling has been made, the next question is how to provide that schooling. Specifically, what should be the role of the State? Arguments can be made for public support, private provision, religious control, or any combination of the three.

The modern conception of public education, the very

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[53]See Tyack in Harvard Educational Review, and Louis M. Smith and Sally Schumacker, "The School as Socializer" in NSSEE Yearbook, 1973, II.

idea of a clear line of separation between "private" and "public" was unknown before the end of the eighteenth century.[54] Until that time, education (in our terms) was conceived to be a private matter, as we have seen in the previous section. Where or whether a child was educated was a question affecting him and his parents alone. It was no one else's duty or right to interfere. Further, it was not supposed that there was any necessity for all children to be formally educated, or that public authority had a duty to provide education.[55] The origins of the modern conception of public education are part of a complex story,[56] involving changes in the role of the state as well as in the general institutional character of society, and are beyond the scope of this paper. Here the focus will be on the class context of the rise of elementary schooling in England and the United States.[57]

From Elizabethan times, elementary schooling has been used in England as one of a group of agents of social control and social welfare. From the seventeenth century,

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[54]Bailyn, op.cit., page 11.

[55]Wardle, op.cit., page 9.

[56]The development of formal schooling, state systems of education, compulsory attendance and universal free schooling often overlapped chronologically and are closely related analytically. Here they are distinguished for purposes of analysis.

[57]It is important to bear in mind that Europe's schools, (and our own as well, to a lesser extent)—primary, secondary, and higher--came into being in different historical periods and directed themselves to different purposes and social groups.

when spinning schools for paupers attempted to make them useful and independent members of society, to the charity schools of the eighteenth century, elementary schooling served in a missionary role. The aim was to serve as a counterweight or corrective to dangerous tendencies in society and to indoctrinate hostile subcultures.[58]

Accordingly, during the mid-nineteenth century debates over the public support of elementary education, it was defined primarily as education for a class, not a specific age group.[59] The upper classes had always managed to educate their sons quite nicely without publicly supported education of any sort. To propose it was, therefore, to propose radical alterations in the distribution of formal education throughout English society. So when elementary education was discussed, the service was not at issue nearly so much as the group for whom it was intended.

The best way to describe elementary education, as it was seen by nineteenth century English policy makers, is as <u>education for other people's children</u>. Specifically, the child of the working classes were the "target population", to use a modern term. Arguments concerning a child's readiness for school, or his potential independence from his mother, would bear little weight compared to political considerations of the effect of lower class schooling and

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[58]Wardle, <u>op.cit.</u>, page 75.

[59]Gillian Sutherland, <u>Policy Making in Elementary Education 1870-1895</u>, (London Oxford University Press, 1973), page 8.

literacy upon the social system as then arranged.

It would not be stretching the point to say that the whole idea behind English public schooling for the masses was nothing more--nor less-than day care. Education was a euphemism for an organized way to care for the children of the working poor. The motives of proponents and opponents who finally accepted the notion were humanitarian, politically astute, and both.

Origins of Public Support for Formal Schooling in the United States. The story in the United States was much the same; New York City's experience is illustrative. It is well documented in Diane Ravitch's excellent study, The Great School Wars.[60]

In the early nineteenth century a new sense of urgency attached to the spread of education. Since the Revolution, statesmen had expressed their belief that illiteracy was a threat to the ideals of the new nation, that a democracy with broad sufferage needed an educated electorate. Thomas Jefferson advocated the universal expansion of education at state expense, so that an aristocracy of intellect might replace an aristocracy of wealth. Some sought to end illiteracy as a way to decrease vice and poverty; others with strong religious convictions advocated popular education in order for all to read the Bible and attain salvation.[61]

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[60] Ravitch, op.cit.
[61] Ibid., op.cit., p. 10.

But the more immediate and practical appeals of the Free School Society for public funds stressed the duty of society to remove children from "the contagion of bad example" so that they might grow to be useful members of the community rather than becoming "the burdens and pests of society." Their proposed free school would help to "diminish the pernicious effects resulting from the neglected education of the children of the poor", which was attributed to the "extreme indigence and intemperance" of parents.[62]

Thus, as Ravitch states, "the first public school in New York City was conceived of as an anti-poverty program, an institution which would directly counter the bad influence of the bad home."[63] The Free School Society determined that the community had to educate poor children to safeguard its own welfare. They hoped to abolish crime and proverty by making education universal. Implicit in their designs was the European two-track system of education, one for the rich and one for the poor.

Conclusion

To search for the rationale for the school age in the United States or England is to discover that none exists.

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[62] Ibid.

[63] William Oland Bourne, 1870, in Ravitch, ibid., p. 11.

Practical considerations abound, but in the sense of a theoretical basis in pedagogical or psychological thought, there is hardly a rationale to be found.

Although it is somewhat unsettling to a researcher in pursuit of precedents and lessons, the atheoretical foundation of this educational practice bears further scrutiny. For what we do not find in history is every bit as important as what we find. That which contemporaries omit from discussion is as significant as what they debate and write about--often it is more significant. That which people take for granted, or consider too outrageous to mention, is almost a more important indicator of their ideas than that which finds its way into their speeches.

To use history wisely, we must not see in its record answers to our own questions where none exist. What was worked out in the past answered a different set of questions, or evolved pragmatically without conscious deliberation. Consequently, it is incorrect to invest some practice with meaning derived from our own interest but utterly foreign to a contemporary society. It does an injustice to the complexities of both ages. Therefore, it is invalid to assume that the particular age of entry as an issue was as important in the eighteenth century, when formalized schooling spread, or in the nineteenth century, when public involvement took hold, as it might be to our own. We wrestle with a different set of issues.

Schooling--what it did and when it commenced--developed

in response to the social, economic, and political needs of society. As they changed, so did schooling. That is its very source, its heritage, and its challenge today.

But before we turn away from the historical record, it is important to consider whether perhaps the specific age of entry into schooling is exactly the point now. Or is it a device which tends to obscure the more basic issues. The significance of this exercise is that it uses the experience of two of the most influential educational systems in the world today to show that our questions over the appropriateness of public services for three or four year olds serve, at bottom, to readdress the same issues that were important when formal public schooling evolved.

At that time, the questions was not so much "when" as "whether" and "for whom." And the hypothesis which emerges from this study is that the same very basic "whether" question is the point now, even when people speak of "when" and at which age. Significant numbers of American families need child care outside the home: the question is whether we as a society are willing to provide it.

The issues are the same as they were in the 1860's in England, and those have already been decided. The time of entry into public schooling is nothing sacred: it evolved from a combination of tradition and practical considerations. So the opposition to publicly supported services for children younger than a given age misses the

point that the basic decisions were made and have been accepted for a hundred years. The issue has never been a particular age of entry, but the right and responsibility of society, through the states, to pick up where the family leaves off in caring for children. If public schooling or care is acceptable for five-year-olds, it is acceptable for three-and-four-year olds as well.

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